

Meeting Minutes, Charter Commission Public Hearing

Wednesday March 9, 2016

7:00 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.

City Hall – Council Chamber

Commissioners include: Josh Krintzman, Chair, Rhanna Kidwell, Vice Chair, Bryan Barash, Jane Frantz, Howard Haywood, Anne Larner, Brooke Lipsitt, Karen Manning, Chris Steele

Introductory Remarks: Josh invites people to sign up and introduces Commissioners. Collects the sign-in Sheet.

Public Comments (Main points/highlights):

Sue Flicop: 145 Florence St. on behalf of LWVN. Looks forward to sharing League's ideas about City Council in future. Refers to 15 recommendations from 2010 LWVN study - some should be completed by ordinance, other are appropriate for charter:

- 1) Recommends keeping "Strong Mayoral" form of government and 4 year term
- 2) Formalize position of Chief Administrative Office (CAO) to report to mayor
- 3) Recommends No Term Limits for SC to be consistent with City Council, and 4 year terms with staggered elections. Eliminate 2% charter maintenance provision in SC Article.
- 4) Overall, LWVN opposes term limits. Term limits for SC means that people can just wait for vacancy to run. Whatever Commission decides, LWVN supports consistency in term limits for CC and SC.
- 5) Term lengths: -2 years is too short for School Committee members. 3 years not practical because some years it would coincide with the state election requiring the city to hold 2 elections that year. Recommends 4 year terms which allows for staggered elections, and eliminates the chance for drastic turnover and lessens information burden on voters (learning about candidates).
- 6) Last point: Charter Maintenance provision is considered arbitrary and does not serve useful purpose as floor or ceiling for capital maintenance.

Ernest Loewenstein, 57 Hyde St., Newton Highlands.

Discusses 2/29 Forum. Heard overwhelming desire for smaller council. Speaks in defense of the larger city council. Believes the democracy aspect is really important. Citizens can reach ward or at large councilors since they can't easily get to the mayor. Austin St. showed importance of City Council and need for large, diverse body. Mayor had spoken his piece. The Council had to be persuaded through democratic process. Don't cut access of government. Too few councilors means more power concentrated in fewer hands and they can be influenced by people with money. The focus now is on Newtonville, but next year it will be someone else's city center.

Isabel Albeck - 240 Winsor Road, Waban.

Wishes to speak about issues not related to Articles 3 and 4.

Describes conflicts of interest w/people who are elected or appointed and make decisions.

[City Council] Public Hearings: Democratic but too time consuming. Can they be improved? Sit through too much before docket item. Votes can be at 10:30 at night when people are exhausted.

Peter Harrington - 157 Lowell Avenue. Supports a strong mayor and concept the mayor is in charge and should run the city. The closer we can keep government to the people, the better off we are.

Term limits-- had been a strong proponent of putting term limits into charter. The last charter commission had 5 votes for imposing term limits.

However, some members were on the Board of Aldermen and did not want to upset colleagues, so one person switched his vote in between the school committee discussion and the board of aldermen discussion and did not vote for term limits for the latter. That is why there is the inconsistency with the School Committee and City Council.

The concept (of term limits) stands as well as it did in 1970. Problem with limits is that strong leaders on a board (SC or CC) do a good job and people don't want to lose them. Others start with determination and fresh ideas but over time, lose some of that determination. Maybe should make way for someone with new ideas, new determinations. Another problem with long term service - people use posts for self-aggrandizement and it is difficult to defeat incumbents. We should have a process that promotes turnover over keeping a few good people for 10, 20 years. Sees term limits for mayor but does not know how that would "fly" with electorate. People might not like it.

Staggered terms would hurt those running in the off-mayoral year. Some run w/the mayor and some don't, always.

Everyone should run for 4 year term w/the mayor. More people and excitement. 3 four year terms? Just Board of Aldermen [City Councilor] elections can be lackluster and everyone :should be in the pile at once”.

Term limits for Boards or Commissions?: Sometimes experience really counts but would supports term limits of 8-10 years. People get tired.

Sallee Lipshutz, 24 Radcliffe Rd., Waban:

Term lengths and limits: Agrees 4 year terms would be good for everyone. Term limits of 8 years in SC, half would stay with staggered terms. Could keep that number and have a big electorate (when they go before the electorate).

Supports strong mayoral form of government.

Legislative: Describes 2/29 meeting and [how Paul Pezzella described] that the wealthy in Worcester elected people to the City Council.

We should retain proportional representation throughout the city. Every village deserves representation. Agrees with Mr. Loewenstein that we are a democracy and believes in grass roots. Area Councilors can help make residents make connections to city councilors.

Article 8: integrate signature requirements for neighborhood area councils unless prohibited by MA law.

Article 11: City agency does not include neighborhood area council in the indemnification clause, so city does not have to provide counsel for area council members. City should indemnify neighborhood area councils and not exclude - according to MA General Law.

Article 4: Remove 2% maintenance requirement. What happens when policy is not followed? Is there some way to enforce the city charter.

SC should have term limits and City Council should not...ballots should not say “incumbents” next to names. Ignorant voters gravitate toward incumbents, and if they are not provided that information they will be motivated to “do their homework” next round. SC and CC serve different populations and having term limits for one and not the other is not inherently unfair. SC could possibly serve 4 year terms and would stagger the terms and retain the 8 year term limit. Provides for continuity and fresh ideas.

24 city councilors is good and having them is delightful. All villages need representation and strong communication with City Hall. 24 Councilors allow that.

Elaine Rush Arruda, 1921 Commonwealth Ave. She wishes to comment on four items:

- 1) Mayor should have term limits (2 terms of 4 years is good). Too easy for incumbents to be re-elected by less informed voters.
- 2) Can a Recall Provision for the Mayor be added to the charter? Would be good to include a recall provision for any elected official.
- 3) Mayors should not be able to campaign for higher office while serving as Mayor.
- 4) We should retain 24 councilors for adequate representation and that ward representation is especially important.

Shaul Berechman, 102 Pearl St. Newton Corner.

Recommends adding an Ombudsman/Parents Advocate for School Committee because there is no mechanism for resolving disputes. This leads to confrontation and mistrust and unequal treatment of children based on money.

SC does not deal w/individual issues, unlike City Council. Notes that many parents do not have the money, i.e. 25K – 100K when they need representation. No other city has an ombudsman that he knows of but thinks we should be the first. Silent minority cannot make progress without legal process. Having the position in the charter protects losing the position at the whim of people in charge.

Anne Dorfman, 9 Henshaw St.

I served on the City's Solid Waste Commission. 3 members were with the DPW and were also Newton residents. It made the DPW "rule the entire process" and that it was destructive that a member of the board of alderman was on the committee. The Mayor's recommending an alderman as chair and having 3 DPW people did not make for a citizen committee. City employees should not be allowed to serve on a commission related to their job.

of Aldermen: Understands people like representation. But what is the role? Does it have to be the aldermen helping if a streetlight is out? What do other communities do? Should an ombudsman field things? Or should there be an outreach office? Councilors spend too much time resolving issues - seems "off". Electorate does not understand how many councilors we have so it's not important to retain the same number. It is important to explore size and role of the council.

Example of work with off leash dog parks: She did not have the time to educate 24 people, so her goal was to reach 13. If you need to communicate with all, 24 is too cumbersome.

Answers question posed by Josh Krintzman: Members of Solid Waste Commission were appointed.

Knowledgeable people were the city people and they dominated. Should be there as resources but not "driving the

bus”.

Lisa Mirabelle, 12 Scribner Park

I support for term limits, in order to engage more people. If there is an open seat, people will talk with others to get people running instead of keeping the seats. Consistency is “weird” and we should have turnover. 8-12 years for term limits would be sufficient.

SC needs turnover so that members have kids in school system.

Question: Is consistency in having no term limits equally desirable?

Answer: No. We should have term limits across the board.

Brian Yates, City Council:

Doesn't matter that people don't know there are 24 Councilors. Do they at least know one? If you lose people (councilors) with unique constituencies, this can alienate people. “If it's not broke, don't fix it”~ If not - someone please articulate how it could be fixed. People say that the council should be “more efficient” but what does that mean? Making laws not the same as widgets. It's not necessarily efficient. Other factors go into law and responsiveness.

He mentions that many people do not even know they live in a city and School Committee discussion about civic government.

Regarding SC term limit, mentions concern that SC members were unresponsive and deeply entrenched. Without term limits, there could be massive turnover. There can be unintended consequences w/term limits for SC. Don't have flexibility. Cites “Apres moi, le deluge”.

Sallee Lipshutz: We should have term limits for committees. Mayor should propose a balanced budget every year.

Lisa Mirabelle: It's not important for residents to know how many councilors there are, but it shouldn't be hard to explain. Voter confusion is bad. Confusion (with 24 councilors) provides a disincentive for people to be involved or to care.

Shaul Berechman: Relationship of the School Committee to the Superintendent and City Council to the Mayor are not the same. The council doesn't hire the Mayor. It is a sign of success that no one can name their councilors.

Everyone would know if things were wrong, so this is an indication the system is working well and is not a reason to change (to smaller council).

Laura Holt, 35 Vineyard Rd: I didn't know how many councilors there are. Shouldn't we aim towards residents who are informed and engaged. How do other cities engage their communities?

Josh Krintzman closes the meeting at 8:30p.m.